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CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND. By George Burton Adams, Ph.D., Litt. D., Professor of History, Emeritus, in Yale College. Henry Holt and Company, New York City, 1921, pp. x, 518.

The importance of the study of the English constitution has been greatly increased within comparatively recent times by the great growth in power of England, her self-governing dominions, and of the United States. These countries form today the most important political group in the world and have a common source for their institutions, England herself. Moreover, during the past century, English political institutions have been widely copied by other peoples throughout the world. The study of this constitution is important in another way. We can trace its development for over a thousand years and this affords a splendid opportunity to examine into the causes, phases and characteristics of the evolution of a set of political institutions. Further, a knowledge of early English law and courts is of decided value to American law students.

But to the general reader and the undergraduate the subject presents difficulties. The ordinary single volume treatises which are of more than an introductory character are confusing and hard to understand. Hence Professor Adams' work meets a long felt want. In a single volume of five hundred pages he goes deeply into the subject, yet traces clearly in chronological sequence the growth of the English monarchy from Saxon times to the present. Though there is abundant detail, it is kept skilfully in subordination to the main theme, the evolution of the constitution, or more specifically, of the limited monarchy.

Not quite half the book is devoted to the medieval period down to about 1450. Such an amount of space is necessary because the fundamentals of the common law, of the administrative system, of the courts and of the limited monarchy were all established in broad outline during this period. The source of the legal and administrative development, he traces mainly not to Anglo-Saxon practices, but to the powerful Norman feudal state established in England after 1066. The limited monarchy began to develop in the thirteenth century and the underlying principle with which it started, that there is a law by which the king is bound and that he can be compelled to obey it if necessary, had its origin in the political feudalism introduced by the Normans. This principle was enforced against the kings of the thirteenth century so often that it was never forgotten. Parliament which arose in the thirteenth century became by the fifteenth the "guardian of the constitution" and the directing power in the state. It was formed by the addition of certain representative elements to the feudal *curia regis* and had no connection whatever with the Saxon witenagemot. Thus the influence of the Norman Conquest can hardly be overestimated and the chapters in which this interpretation is developed form the most important contribution to our knowledge in the whole work.

Only a single chapter is devoted to the Tudor period largely because absolutism was not to be the final form of the constitution. The author explains clearly the causes of the rise of absolutism, the machinery through which it worked and the grave danger with which the progress of limited

monarchy was threatened. The seventeenth century was an age of struggle between the partisans of absolute and limited monarchy. The issue was after some time sharply drawn as to where sovereignty lay. The final result was a compromise, at the time only imperfectly understood, by which the king remained in form and appearance sovereign, but the reality of power lay with parliament. This compromise has never been challenged by the king since 1688, in great part because for a long time he had a position of great real power, for a longer time an appearance of great power, and permanently a place of real dignity and immense influence. This peculiar arrangement facilitated the adoption of the English system by states during the last century which were faced with the necessity of abandoning absolutism. The result of the struggle in the seventeenth century had immeasurable effects in extending the influence of the English constitution. The age was important in another way. During the struggle the theory of the sovereignty of the people was developed. After a brief experiment, the English rejected it. In the simpler societies of the American colonies, this theory was taken up and never abandoned. Thus English constitutional development split into two parts, one in England and the other in America, both advancing toward democracy by different routes.

The eighteenth century saw the formation of the cabinet by means of which parliament secured indirectly the complete control over the direction of the policy of the state. Finally in the past century, the social and economic changes effected by the industrial revolution have led to universal suffrage and the responsibility of cabinet and parliament to the people has been established. England has become a democracy with the forms of a monarchy.

Baldly stated this is the theme of the work. What makes the book remarkable is the consummate skill with which an immense mass of institutional detail of all sorts has been marshalled to show the steady growth of the constitution.

One expects from an expert medievalist like the author an able account of the medieval period. But his contribution does not stop there. It would not, for example, be easy to find a clearer or more profound account of the issues and significance of the seventeenth century or better chapters on the origin and growth of the cabinet.

Some knowledge of the political narrative is necessary to understand fully this history. The more important documents should be read in a source book. Limitations of space have prevented Professor Adams from discussing some topics of importance as fully as a class requires, but this is no disadvantage to a teacher.

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